

*** NETANSWERS INTERNET EXTRA ***
*** Number 54: Online Contests ***

Feeling lucky?

As you've surfed the Web, you have probably noticed contests from time to time, and perhaps you entered one or two on a lark. Thousands of Web sites hold contests, giving away prizes ranging from the extravagant (like computers, cars and cash) to the picayune (t-shirts and mousepads). If you're feeling lucky, you can go from site to site, entering these contests all day long.

What contest junkies need is a way to find the Web's best contests and jump straight to them. What luck! Several excellent sites provide just this service.

Some contests are downright easy to enter: just type your e-mail address, press "submit," and you've got a chance to win. Other contests demand more information from entrants -- entry forms that require names, addresses, and phone numbers are common, while some require even more personal information. There's no telling how the sites will use this information: you might find yourself receiving commercial e-mail or postal mail from those companies. Some entry forms include checkboxes that allow you to opt out of receiving advertising material, and other sites tell how they'll use your information in the rules or privacy policy page. Other contests may lead to commercial messages arriving without any warning at all.

Some contests demand more work than just filling out a form: for instance, you might be required to explore a Web site looking for hidden clues. (If you ask me, it's not worth taking a lot of time to participate in a contest. If I can't enter and be out of there in a minute or two, I'll skip it.) For some contests, all you need to win is pure luck -- your name goes into the virtual hat, and if it is picked, you're a winner. Other contests demand more skill, such as trivia knowledge or a keen ability to predict the stock market.

Ready to take a chance? Here are some of the best sites for finding those online contests.

ContestGuide (<http://www.contestguide.com>) is a well-organized site listing about 400 contests. Contests are indexed based on how often you may enter: daily, weekly, biweekly, monthly, or just once. For each contest, the site lists the sponsor, the prize, the ending date, and a brief description.

Take the time to read the first timers' manual, which offers suggestions for maximizing your "winning potential." (This basically means entering the most frequent contests first, and entering as many contests as possible.) When you win -- or if you want to feel jealous of others who did -- visit the site's Bragger's Corner message board. And if you win but don't like the prize, you can offer to trade it in the Trading Post message board. (Of course, this means ignoring that adage about gift horses.)

Sweepstakes Advantage (<http://www.sweepsadvantage.com>) is another winner -- its easy to hone in on interesting contests with this well-organized site. Lengthy tables list sweepstakes and contests, with brief descriptions of the prizes and entry restrictions (such as age and residency requirements). Contests are sorted

by how often you may enter. This is a great site: uncluttered and free of fluff, just lots of links to Web contests.

Sweepstakes Online (<http://www.sweepstakesonline.com>) is another worthwhile site, serving up links to hundreds of contests. You can browse by prize theme (including vacation, cash, cars, computers, and music) or by contest frequency. You can also browse the various types of contests: trivia, scavenger hunts, writing, cooking and so on.

Every contest is given a rating on a scale of one to five stars -- presumably contests with higher ratings are more worthwhile, although an explanation of the rating system is not evident. The site offers a free e-mail newsletter that includes news about new contests and tips for winning.

Red Hot Sweeps Sites (<http://www.redhotsites.com>) provides more than 1,300 contest links, so it's a good thing it is so well organized. Like the other contest sites, Red Hot provides impressive listings of daily, weekly, and monthly Web contests. This site goes further, listing contests you can enter by calling 800-numbers or sending postal mail.

The "What's Cool" page serves up a list of the most popular contests for the month. You'll also find message boards where you can talk about contests, brag about your winnings, or get tips from people who have been luckier than you.

Huron On Line (<http://www.huronline.com>) is rather cluttered with banners and ugly design, but it does provide a reasonable listing of sweepstakes and contests. The site arranges contests by type of prizes, so you can jump straight to contests with automotive, computer, travel, or sports prizes.

Find some interesting contests -- then enter early and often. Good luck!

==*== SITES MENTIONED IN THIS ISSUE ==*==

ContestGuide: <http://www.contestguide.com>
Sweepstakes Advantage: <http://www.sweepsadvantage.com>
Sweepstakes Online: <http://www.sweepstakesonline.com>
Red Hot Sweeps Sites: <http://www.redhotsites.com>
Huron On Line: <http://www.huronline.com>

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The NetAnswers Internet Extra is free to all CompuServe members. It's available in the Internet New Users Forum (GO INETNEW) in file library 11, "NetAnswers".

Got comments or ideas for future issues? We want to hear 'em. Just send a message to savetz@compuserve.com (74774,2725).

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